

Appropriations Committee Public Hearing on Proposed FY 23 Adjustments for Human Services Agencies

Time: Feb 24, 2022 02:00 PM

Testimony submitted by: Roger Stikeleather, rstike@comcast.net; Father of Shannon Stikeleather, Westbrook, CT., a DDS supported client and Vista Life Innovations member

Good afternoon and thank you for your time this afternoon. I am Roger Stikeleather and I am the father of Shannon, who is intellectually disabled. I am speaking today to ask the Appropriations Committee to submit in the Budget Adjustment Bill funding to bring the DDS funded In Home Support Rate to a level that is comparable to other funded services and that is a rate that covers the cost of service delivery. The current proposed COLA increases of 4 to 8% do not come close to bringing this rate, which is currently \$34/hour of one to one service, to a reasonable level. This specific In Home Support rate requires a 15% increase in order to bring it to parity with other state rates.

My daughter, Shannon, needs a lot of help managing her daily life. Currently she receives In-Home Supports (IHS) from the State of CT Department of Disability Services. These support services, which happen in and out of the home, and are meant to support independence, are delivered by Vista Life Innovations, based in south central Connecticut, and consist of various forms of in-person life skills instruction/training and support making day to day life decisions (shopping list, appropriate social interactions, figuring out bus schedules, safe kitchen practices, etc.) We think of it as Shannon having visiting “moms/dads”— so helpful, because even though she calls us 10-20 times a day and we visit often, she needs more. Importantly, **these services have allowed Shannon to live independently and not require 24/7 Group Home services.**

I am very concerned—actually scared—that due to inadequate State DDS funding for these In-Home Supports my daughter and ~60 other state-funded disabled individuals at Vista will lose these services, due to Vista’s inability to continue bridging the gap between the cost of providing these services and the reimbursement they receive for them. The loss of Vista support would represent a devastating and life altering disruption in Shannon’s life and the lives of other Vista members and their families, the potential loss of their jobs, homes, roommates and friends and other support systems. Moreover, for most of these individuals it would probably mean placement in more restrictive 24/7 support Group Homes.

The cost of these group homes would be 2 to 3 times more per person compared to the current In-Home Support service costs. **In other words, the loss of these service supports through Vista will be a lose/lose for my daughter and the State of Connecticut.**

Shannon has thrived at Vista for 24 years. She has lived in a 4- bedroom parent-purchased house with three other disabled Vista members for almost 20 years. All receive In Home Support Services but not all are funded by DDS. These roommates are family to her and each other. Shannon has worked at her current job for over 10 years and is a valued employee. She accesses public transportation for shopping, her bank, the YMCA, and other necessary services/activities and has many friends in the community to socialize with. She has a full, rich diverse life and the Vista Life Innovations community is the only life she has known as an adult. Imagine someone telling you that you were being torn away from the family you have created as an adult, and that you have known for 20+ years, due to funding issues. To callously disrupt her life seems, to her mother and me, unimaginable.

Since I am an eight plus year member of the Vista Life Innovations Board of Directors and Chair of Audit Committee, I have significant access and understanding of the Vista financials. I have seen the audited financials that are submitted to the state that confirm the significant organizational financial losses occurring as a result of inadequate In- Home Supports (IHS) DDS reimbursement. Vista costs per service hour are approximately \$52 as compared to DDS reimbursement rate of \$34 per hour. The reimbursement for these services has in no way kept pace with inflation, state-mandated wage increases, and indirect services costs.

The magnitude (hundreds of thousands of dollars annually) of these financial losses is not sustainable and could force discontinuation of these service supports to our daughter and the other ~60 Intellectually disabled individuals in the fiscal year 2023, perhaps as early as third quarter of 2022. It is my understanding that other similar organizations in Connecticut providing IHS support are also facing financial deficits and have discontinued or are considering discontinuation of these services.

The potential discontinuation of services and loss of Vista Support will create significant burdens for these disabled individuals and the loss of the rich, full life they have known for most of their adult lives. The worry and disruption to their families, many of whom are senior in age and depend on other family members (siblings, etc.) for support for their sons and daughters, will be painful.

Shannon's mother and I respectfully request that the State of CT DDS reimbursement for In Home Supports (IHS) be increased to appropriate levels effective FY '23 so that the lives of these Intellectually disabled individuals and their families will not be thrown into chaos and that the State of Connecticut will not incur unnecessary increased costs for less appropriate support services.

Thank you for your time and consideration and feel free to contact me at any time for any questions or suggestions you may have.